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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0216
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000153

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BERT BRAUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA MEETING NATO MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

REF: A. SKOPJE 143

[1](#)B. SKOPJE 99
[1](#)C. SKOPJE 86

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In striving to meet NATO membership requirements, the GOM is taking a constructive approach to resolving the name dispute with Athens, although there are concerns the Greeks will veto Macedonia's NATO bid even if Skopje demonstrates additional flexibility. The government has shown significant progress in pursuing implementation of the May 29 agreement, but opposition DUI tactics make it unlikely that the social package for victims of the 2001 conflict or a draft language law will be complete before key decisions are made on NATO membership. Anti-corruption efforts continue to reflect government willingness to tackle cases involving prominent ex-officials with past ties to the current government, as well as petty corruption that undermines public confidence in government institutions. End summary.

NAME DISPUTE -- CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH

[1](#)2. (C) Although resolving the name dispute with Greece is not a NATO membership criterion, the Macedonian government has worked hard over the past 10 days to find through the Nimetz process a constructive solution to the issue that will remove the Greek veto threat. It has tried to prepare the public for a compromise, broken with its past "dual name" position to signal willingness to accept a differentiated name for use in international organizations, and reiterated its commitment to the Nimetz process and continued negotiations (ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) Following meetings between the government and opposition over the February 23-24 weekend, Macedonia's political leaders reached consensus on using the five names proposed by Nimetz as a "common basis" for a mutually-agreed name to be used in bilateral relations with Athens. According to the PM's Chief of Staff Martin Protoger, the group also agreed to indicate which parts of the Nimetz proposal were acceptable, which needed further clarification, and which were unacceptable. Greek PM Karamanlis's recent press statements reiterating the threat of a Greek veto had made it difficult for the government to be more forward-leaning in its initial negotiating position, Protoger said.

WILL ATHENS VETO EVEN IF SKOPJE IS FLEXIBLE?

¶4. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador February 25, FM Milososki said there was increasing concern in government circles that Greece would veto Macedonia's NATO bid even if Skopje showed additional flexibility. In addition, he said, the government wanted to get from Nimetz further clarification about what was meant by paragraph 8 of his proposal ("No state shall assert exclusive rights, political or commercial, to the names "Macedonia" or "Macedonian" standing alone.) Was that formulation intended to exclude the right of Macedonians to describe their nationality or language?

MAY 29 AGREEMENT -- LAST MILE'S THE TOUGHEST

¶5. (SBU) Implementation of the May 29 VMRO-DUI agreement, already three-fifths complete, has bogged down over fundamental philosophical differences in approach (ref B). Although progress on remaining issues is stalled, however, the atmosphere in regular VMRO-DUI meetings is steadily improving and occasionally is even cordial.

¶6. (SBU) Despite the government's offer to DUI of a social package for victims of conflict, DUI has resurrected its insistence on a law on former NLA fighters (a non-starter for VMRO and a condition that was not required in the May 29 agreement). Nor has DUI dropped its explicit linkage between completing the social package deal and closing a deal on a draft language law to be submitted to parliament. As a result, the social package discussions remain deadlocked; neither side has moved to restart that process.

¶6. (SBU) Progress on a draft language law has been slow but

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notable, with VMRO agreeing during a joint working group meeting on February 22 to DUI's proposal to allow the use of the Albanian language by the chairs of parliamentary committees. Despite acknowledgments on both sides that a solution to the issue is unlikely before the NATO summit, the two parties have agreed to continue discussions in the next two working group meetings on use of minority languages in parliament, in the judiciary, and in the executive branch. Junior governing coalition partner DPA's reluctance to allow DUI any more "successes" is an additional brake on concluding remaining May 29 issues.

ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS MOVING AHEAD

¶7. (SBU) As reported in ref C, the GOM's anti-corruption efforts are steadily progressing. Two ongoing "big fish" trials, of a prominent Macedonian businessman and a former National Bank Governor with past ties to the current government, demonstrate the GOM's willingness to combat corruption in a non-partisan and transparent manner. The government also has targeted crooked government toll-booth collectors, showing it is equally willing to take robust action against public employees to fight even petty corruption activities.

MILOVANOVIC